Myths and Questions About Homelessness

There are many myths and stereotypes that people believe about homelessness. This misinformation is problematic, as it further contributes to the stigmatization of a population that is already marginalized. In order to appropriately tackle the issue of homelessness and create a society where individuals feel comfortable accessing supports, these myths must be deconstructed and understood to be false by the general public.

Below are six of the many misconceptions about homelessness, each followed by the reality.

1. Myth: People choose to be homeless.

Fact: A variety of different factors (http://homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/causes-homelessness) can contribute to an individual's experience of homelessness. Often, people experience homelessness when all other options have been exhausted, and/or they are dealing with circumstances that make it difficult to maintain housing. (http://homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/causes-homelessness) Some of the obstacles (http://homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/causes-homelessness) that may lead people to their experiences of homelessness include:

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- Eviction

- Coping with mental illnesses (http://homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/topics/mental-health)or addictions, which makes it difficult to maintain independent housing

2. Myth: People experiencing homelessness are lazy.

Fact: In order to survive, many people who experience homelessness are constantly in search for the necessities of life, such as food, shelter and a source of income. Therefore, due to the barriers that they face, many people experiencing homelessness do not have the option of being stagnant or lazy. For example, searching for a job becomes even more challenging when an individual does not have access to a phone, computer, or fixed address on a regular basis. (http://homelesshub.ca/blog/employment-homelessness)

3. Myth: All people who experience homelessness are addicts. (http://homelesshub.ca/resource/study-homelessness-and-addiction)

Fact: Many people who experience homelessness do not struggle with substance abuse problems or addictions. Just like in the general population, only a percentage of those who are experiencing homelessness (http://homelesshub.ca/resource/study-homelessness-and-addiction)deal with addictions. People experiencing homelessness may deal with other issues related to their experiences of homelessness, including trauma and mental illness (http://homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/legal-justice-issues/trauma-and-victimization), for example.

4. Myth: People experiencing homelessness should just find a job.

Fact: There are already people experiencing homelessness who are employed; however, it is much more difficult to find a job while experiencing homelessness. A number of different challenges, such as: l (http://homelesshub.ca/blog/employment-homelessness)acking a permanent address, not having regular access to showers, barriers to transportation, and other difficulties like mental illness (http://homelesshub.ca/blog/employment-homelessness), (http://homelesshub.ca/blog/employment-homelessness) make it difficult to obtain employment. Even when individuals experiencing homelessness find jobs, they are often part-time or minimum wage positions. This work fails to adequately meet their needs, due to expensive housing costs. (http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/affordable-housing)

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services (http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/emergency-response/retooling-emergency-services), such as shelters and food banks. For individuals who are trying to escape a cycle of poverty and homelessness, emergency services alone are not adequate. There is a need to focus on the larger systemic factors, including the lack of affordable housing (http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/affordable-housing) and the criminalization of homelessness (http://homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/legal-justice-issues/criminalization-homelessness) that prevent people from obtaining permanent and suitable shelter.

6. Myth: Property values will go down if we let homeless shelters into our neighbourhoods.

Fact: Downtown Toronto, Canada is a concentrated area with supports and services for people experiencing homelessness. Despite the large numbers of people who go into the downtown core to access these services, housing prices remain high and there is no evidence to support this myth. (http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/affordable-housing) This common misperception and attitude is referred to as "Not in My Backyard" (NIMBY) (http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/affordable-housing/nimby-not-my-backyard) and can have detrimental effects for people who need to access services in different neighbourhoods.

Overall, the myths that exist about homelessness are generalizations of a more complicated reality. It is important for those who have never experienced homelessness before to understand that every homeless individual faces a different and complex set of circumstances. It is the responsibility of the general public to educate themselves about issues related to homelessness. This will hopefully result in sensitive and compassionate conversations and solutions to homelessness.

Causes of Homelessness (https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/causes-homelessness)

Preventing Homelessness (https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/preventing-homelessness)

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Land Acknowledgment (https://www.homelesshub.ca/land-acknowledgment)

COH's Anti-Racism Statement (https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-observatory-homelessnesss-anti-racism-statement)

Privacy Policy (https://www.homelesshub.ca/privacy-policy)

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